

5th Sunday after Pentecost
Matthew 10:24-39 6/20/99

How dangerous is your life?

What do you suppose are the most dangerous occupations? Could it be soldier, a policeman, or those guys who do construction on skyscrapers, or maybe a radiologist? A man recently told me that he thought the most dangerous job is that of being Dad. When you let your children go, and give them their independence there always is the danger that they will turn their backs on you or not return.

What's the most dangerous recreation? Could it be skydiving or mountain climbing, participating in one of the popular extreme sports like bungie jumping from a bridge, or maybe jumping on a trampoline in the backyard?

What locations are the most dangerous to live in? London, Pyongyang the capital of North Korea, Acapulco, Mexico, San Salvador, El Salvador or how about Alexandria Virginia or Washington DC..

We cannot predict where real danger is going to be. I've probably told some of you this example before. It's from Bill's first year on Baffin Island doing research in the arctic and I went along as an assistant. We spent much of the summer camping alone on a major denning track for polar bears. Many of our friends had faced polar bears in the past. We had heard the horror stories. Local Inuit gave us instructions about how to jump over

the left paw as the bear was circling and then kill the bear by stabbing it in the neck.

Someone always stayed awake for polar bear watch. We worried and prayed every night for safety.

I came home two weeks earlier than Bill and then drove to the airport to pick him up. All the way to the airport I thought, "Wow, thank you Lord! We made it through the whole summer without a polar bear attack. I'm glad to be safe at home."

Then in the airport parking ramp, a man approached me and asked what I was carrying in my bag. I thought he was spare changing me and I politely said "Nothing of importance, I'm late for a plane." He seemed taken aback by my answer and backed away. As he did so I realized that he was holding a gun in my side. And there was a second man behind me with a metal pipe in his hands...but they walked away. To this day I don't know why, other than "the Lord was with me." The point is that I thought the danger was in the arctic and instead it was at right here at home.

We cannot always predict how dangerous things are going to be, but our lessons today are clear about one thing:

Doing the work of the Lord is dangerous business. As God's spokesman, the prophet Jeremiah experienced great personal suffering because his words of judgment, though faithful to God were very unpopular.

Jesus understood the same threat. In today's lesson from Matthew, he warns the disciples (and us as readers) that faithful ministry will meet with opposition.

It is dangerous business to live our lives as Christians in an angry, antagonistic world.

To remain faithful will require absolute trust in God and unswerving commitment to the Lord.

The life of a Christian, a Christian who takes the gospel to heart, is not easy. It may even mean death.

Today's gospel lesson concludes with the words:

“Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

Those words sort of stick in my throat. But we know it is true.

Christians are facing heavy persecution around the world even today.

A recent (5/26/17) Christian Century magazine reported:

Members of dozens of churches are in hiding and Catholic institutions in particular have been attacked in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in recent months....In eastern and central Congo, Catholic churches, seminaries, and houses for religious orders have been attacked, several women religious have been murdered, and some priests are in hiding for fear of being killed. In the Kasai region—where two United Nations investigators were killed in March—a Catholic monastery, convent, hospital, school, and diocesan building were burned in early April. In the same area, Congolese Mennonite leaders said that

thousands of people from 30 congregations had taken refuge in forests near their homes for fear of violence.

Gatherings of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Congo in May were canceled because church members had fled to wooded areas to hide, reported the Christian Recorder, the newspaper of the global AME church.

The roots of the current violence go back at least as far as the 1960s...

[Cchristiancentury.org/article/congo%E2%80%99s-churches-facing-violence](http://christiancentury.org/article/congo%E2%80%99s-churches-facing-violence)

In a June 7th Christian Century (**Christopher Lamb**):

Pope Francis used the political capital he has built up with the Islamic world to issue a powerful condemnation of religion-inspired violence, calling on Muslim leaders to unite against terrorist acts.

Francis made his remarks April 28 at an international peace conference held at Al-Azhar, a tenth-century mosque and university in Cairo that is a globally influential center of Sunni Muslim learning. The pontiff's speech opened a two-day trip that came less than three weeks after Palm Sunday attacks on two Coptic Christian churches in Egypt that left 45 dead and scores injured.

“Let us say once more a firm and clear ‘No!’ to every form of violence, vengeance, and hatred carried out in the name of God,” the pope said.

Matt Walsch offered a different perspective in a piece on his blog entitled Why America is a dangerous country for Christians

Our country is very dangerous for Christians. In fact, our country, and western culture as a whole, may be more dangerous for Christians than any other place anywhere in the world, at any time.

By this I'm obviously not referring to physical dangers.

He goes on to make the point that we are in great spiritual danger.

Something to think about!

These articles point to the dangers of being a Christian but they also speak a word of comfort and promise.

Though the life of a Christian may be difficult, we are never alone. Jesus tells us, do not be afraid, have no fear, each of us is important and God cares for us and stands with us. That's why the community, the church is so important. We stand together, giving each other comfort and support.

As people of faith, we have been called and sent, called and sent for mercy, justice, love.

This is sometimes a dangerous calling.

However, In Christ we need not fear, we have not been forgotten.

This is the good news for those of us living in a dangerous world.

This is the good news of the gospel. Amen